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ABSTRACT

A total of 26 representatives of government departments, relevant national bodies, and guidance professional associations in England, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales met to identify ways they might work together to improve the information, advice, and guidance services available to adults in their respective countries. The discussions focused on the following three topics: key features of adult guidance systems and initiatives in each country; similarities and differences between the systems and initiatives in each country; areas of common concern; and possible future actions. Despite significant differences in the ways guidance policy is evolving in each country, the five countries shared common concerns related to the following seven issues: (1) making the case for free, accessible guidance on learning and work; (2) funding for in-depth guidance; (3) marketing to foster broader public understanding of the need for adult guidance; (4) marketing to promote lifelong learning; (5) development and use of quality standards; (6) supporting networking among practitioners; and (7) finding a better way to utilize broadcasting and other information and communication technologies within existing models of guidance delivery. The participants also identified 11 possible future actions in the areas of sharing experience, comparative evaluations, and common action. (MN)

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ED 438 435

Home Internationals: Adult Guidance Policy Developments in Britain and Ireland

Report on a NICEC/CRAC policy consultation held on 19-20 October 1999 at Madingley Hall, Cambridge

in collaboration with the National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance

and supported by the Department for Education and Employment and other relevant government departments

the Guidance Council

D/EE
Department for Education and Employment

NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation sponsored by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

CRAC

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre is a registered educational charity and independent development agency founded in 1964. Its education and training programmes, publications and sponsored projects provide links between the worlds of education and employment.

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There are significant variations in the ways in which adult guidance for learning and work is developing in different parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Devolution within the UK could increase these variations. Many of the issues, however, are common. There is much potential for sharing experience among five countries which have many common interests. The proposals for a Council of the Isles could offer potential for extending the exchange.

The aim of the consultation was to explore practical ways in which national organisations and agencies in England, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales might work together to improve the information, advice and guidance services for adults that are available in the respective countries. The objectives were:

- to examine the similarities and differences between adult guidance systems and relevant current initiatives in the different countries;
- to explore issues of common concern;
- to identify ways of harnessing the potential reciprocal learning from the similarities and differences.

The 26 participants included representatives of government departments (Department for Education and Employment; Training and Employment Agency for Northern Ireland; the Scottish Executive; the National Assembly for Wales; and the Department of Education and Science and National Training and Employment Authority in the Republic of Ireland) and of relevant national bodies and guidance professional associations. The consultation was chaired by Valerie Bayliss, Vice-Chair of the Guidance Council.

This report recalls the main outcomes of the discussions, including recommendations for future action. It is written by Tony Watts, Director of NICEC, who acted as rapporteur at the event. It does not necessarily represent the views of the consultation sponsors, of any particular individual present.

KEY FEATURES

The key features of current initiatives on information, advice and guidance (IAG) for adults, identified at the consultation, included:

England

- Following a series of short-term adult guidance initiatives, steps are currently being taken to develop a sustainable infrastructure for a new public service, based on local partnerships. The partnerships are initially being required to provide a free and universally available information and advice service on learning and work; the intention is to add in due course a guidance dimension, which may need to be charged for. This provision is complemented by a Learning Direct helpline and website, managed by UfI.
- By 2001, all IAG provision in receipt of public funds will need to be quality-assured, based on the Guidance Council's quality standards. A new board has been set up to accredit providers in relation to the standards.
- The Government has separate policies regarding IAG for adults and guidance for young people: there is a risk that disjointedness between services for the two groups could grow if (as seems possible) the Careers Service is replaced by a Youth Support Service.

Northern Ireland

- The Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) has a network of jobcentres which provide a careers service to young people and adults, as well as an employment service. It is thus in principle an all-age service, although the services for young people and adults tend to be delivered separately in practice.
- The Government's lifelong learning agenda, with support from the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, has resulted in the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) inviting the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (a community-based organisation) to establish regional guidance networks through which impartial guidance and information will be available throughout Northern Ireland.
- Efforts are being made to bring T&EA and educational guidance provision within a common strategic model.

Republic of Ireland

- The National Training and Employment Agency (FAS) has a statutory responsibility to provide adult guidance. Its service is provided in association with Local Employment Services, in areas where these exist: the two sets of services are now to be merged into a new National Employment Service.
- More attention is being given to adult guidance within adult education, as part of the debates which have followed a Green Paper issued in December 1998. The outcome may distinguish between a universal foundation service (information, signposting and advice) and a specialised service (counselling and assessment), the latter of which might be included in course fees. At present, there is limited provision, mainly informational in nature. The aspiration to embed guidance within education to some extent mirrors the school system of school-based guidance counsellors, though it is likely to be based on a less strongly professionalised model.
- Networks, especially spanning education and employment authorities, are underdeveloped. It is unclear how far these are to remain separate systems, and how far links between them might grow.

Scotland

- Adult guidance networks were set up in 1997, to address previous fragmentation, and achieve cohesion and co-ordination. Funding for the networks has been extended to 2001, though at static levels.
- A Scottish Guidance Group has been set up by the Scottish Office (now replaced by the Scottish Executive) to develop a strategic national approach to adult guidance. This may remain in place, or may in due course become an independent group which could represent the guidance field to government.
- The role of the Careers Service within adult guidance networks varies. A review of the Careers Service has recently been announced: it is looking at roles and activities, not structures. It may or may not lead in the direction of an all-age service.

Wales

- Adult guidance networks have been in place for some years, co-ordinated by Training and Enterprise Councils. Funding for the networks has been made available by the Welsh Office (now replaced by the

National Assembly for Wales) to provide free access to information and advice, plus free guidance for those not in work. Network development has been framed by guidelines on priorities, standards and evaluation.

- A Learning Direct helpline is delivered from four regional centres to ensure strong links with adult guidance networks. It is funded and run by the National Assembly for Wales. It has close links with the Ufl-managed service in England in terms of operating standards and sharing of data on learning opportunities.
- A proposal to establish an all-age guidance service – Careers Wales – is being considered by the National Assembly for Wales. Careers Wales would draw together the Careers Service, the Adult Guidance Initiative and Learning Direct under one lead provider (the careers service company) in each area.

CONTRASTS

Contrasts identified at the consultation included:

- Adult guidance has a specific statutory base in the Republic of Ireland (at least in relation to employment-oriented guidance) but not in the United Kingdom.
- In Wales, policy appears to be moving towards an all-age approach; in England, it appears to be moving in the opposite direction, with the risk of an even sharper distinction between services for young people and for adults.
- In England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the Learning Direct helpline is being run by Ufl; in Wales, it is being managed outside Ufl and integrated into adult guidance networks.
- In England, a clear policy now exists on quality standards, based on formal implementation of the Guidance Council's standards; elsewhere, policy on quality standards is still at a formative stage.
- In Wales, careers services are regarded as the likely lead partners in adult guidance partnerships; in England and Scotland, careers services are likely to be lead partners in many but not all areas; in Northern Ireland, a more community-based approach is being adopted.
- In the Republic of Ireland, adult guidance tends to be more strongly embedded within adult education provision; in the United Kingdom, it tends to be more strongly based outside such provision.

COMMON ISSUES

Making the case

The social and economic case for universal free access to information and advice on learning and work is now widely accepted, linked to the need to sustain employability and to develop a learning society. Many recognise that the case has been made in principle for in-depth guidance too, though there is not as yet universal acceptance. This suggests the advisability of continuing to collect and marshall evidence on the benefits of such guidance.

Funding

There is a need for policy attention to be focused on how in-depth guidance is to be funded, the extent to which individuals should be expected to pay for it, and what provision should be made for the low-paid. In the United Kingdom, the role of guidance in relation to Individual Learning Accounts could be significant in this respect.

Marketing

There is concern that the public does not adequately understand IAG or recognise how it could benefit them. Many only access it reactively, when in crisis. Wider public understanding is particularly important if individuals are to pay for in-depth guidance. There is a need for a marketing campaign, based on careful market research. This needs to be sensitive to the distinctive nature of IAG, and the extent to which its essence is a process rather than a product.

Branding

The marketing campaign should be linked to the promotion of lifelong learning (e.g. by Ufl) but should include distinctive branding of IAG. It would be helpful if such branding could be based on an internationally-recognised symbol.

Quality standards

The brand should if possible be used only where specified quality standards are met. The standards should provide assurance to individuals, as well as an incentive to improve service quality in meeting clients' needs.

Networks

Current policy regarding IAG recognises the diversity of present provision, and the rationale for such diversity. It accordingly seeks to add value through effective networking. Information is needed on how such networks can best be supported, and how they can effectively incorporate the voluntary and private sector as well as the public sector. In addition, attention is needed to ways of valuing the wide range of practitioner competences within current provision, while also promoting upskilling.

Finding a better way

Practice so far has tended to be based on utilising broadcasting and other information and communication technologies within existing models of working. Possibilities need to be explored for new models exploiting more fully the rapidly developing potential of these technologies.

FUTURE ACTION

The consultation participants felt that there was considerable scope for continued dialogue and collaboration. This might take three forms:

1 Sharing experience

There is much to be gained from sharing ideas, good practice and 'good learning' (including learning from mistakes) across the countries. Areas include:

- Clarifying the nature of information, advice and guidance, and the relationship between them.
- Networking: what works and what does not.
- Ways of addressing the needs of those with literacy problems, reluctant learners, and those in disadvantaged communities.
- 'Finding a better way': developing new ways of working.

Such networking could take place through the Internet. There might also be a case for further consultation events (e.g. on 'finding a better way').

2 Comparative evaluations

Where differences exist between the different countries, comparative evaluations would be useful, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches. Examples might include:

- Within the UK, the merits and demerits of basing Learning Direct inside or outside Ufl.
- The merits and demerits of an all-age approach to guidance.

Such comparative evaluations would utilise the differences as an opportunity for evidence-based learning (see David Raffe *et al.*: Comparing England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: the case for 'home internationals' in comparative research. *Comparative Education*, 35(1), 1999, 9-25).

3 Common action

There are a number of areas where common action would be worth exploring. Ideas include:

- A 'Guidance Week'.
- Collaborative market research into individuals' wants and needs, and what they understand by guidance (the Guidance Council is planning further research in this area: this might be conducted on a collaborative cross-national basis).
- A common 'brand' for IAG services, recognising the value of individuals being able to identify it even when they move from country to country.
- Possible harmonisation of quality standards in support of a common brand.
- Collecting evaluation evidence to support the 'business case' for investment in guidance.